Sandhu-Ray: No Stunt, Preacher Says

By STAN DELOZIER
News-Sentinel Staff Writer

Dr. James Lawson, the Methodist minister who says he will marry James Earl Ray and Anna Sandhu, says he will do it "because that's what Martin Luther King would do."

Dr. Lawson, who was pastor of Centenary Methodist Church in Memphis when Dr. King was shot to death in 1968, is now minister of a church in Los Angeles.

"Yes, I agreed to marry them." Dr. Lawson said Friday by telephone. "I think that's exactly what my good friend Martin Luther King would do if he could come back. He would do it even if James Earl Ray is guilty of killing him."

Dr. Lawson said he belives that Ray, who is serving a 99-year prison term in Brushy Mountain State Prison for the murder of Dr. King, is innocent.

"I visited with him this past summer," Dr. Lawson said. "I didn't get the vibes of a racist, and I've been among a few in my life."

Further, Dr. Lawson said he believes that Ray's confession was made under duress, that the Memphis police coerced the confession from him. He said it was never proved to him "beyond a shadow of a doubt" that Ray shot Dr. King.

"The evidence presented never put Ray in the bathroom at the boarding house where the FBI says the fatal shot came from," he said. "They never even put the bullet that struck King in the gun that Ray supposedly had. In addition, there has never been any kind of motive explained."

Dr. Lawson said he has followed the Ray case closely and that he met him and Miss Sandhu earlier this year at Brushy Mountain. He accompanied Rev. Jesse Jackson to the prison in July to talk with Ray.

"That's when I met Anna Sandhu," Dr. Lawson said. "And then I saw her in Washington again in August at the congressional hearings. I had lunch with her a couple of times and on other occasions I talked with her at some length."

Dr. Lawson said there is not a chance that the announcement of the marriage is a publicity stunt.

"They are sincere," he said. "There's not a doubt in my mind. It was clear to me when I talked with Anna that there is a very deep feeling in her for James Earl Ray."

Dr. Lawson also pointed out that Miss Sandhu was in Washington and had accompanied Ray to the hearings at his request.

"She called me Tuesday night and asked if I would marry them," he said.

Plans 'Surprise' Ray's Attorney

BY CAROL BYRD
Journal State Reporter

James Earl Ray's attorney, Mark Lane, said Tuesday he was both "surprised and pleased" on learning of his client's upcoming marriage to Knoxvillian Anna Sandhu.

"I was indeed surprised," Lane said in a phone interview from San Francisco. "I knew he liked Anna a lot. But he doesn't talk about personal things that much, so I had no idea what he was planning.

"I talked with James today (Tuesday) and he confirmed he is getting married. I said 'congratulations.' He laughed and said 'thank you.'"

Ray, who is serving a 99-year prison term in Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary for the 1968 slaying of civil rights leader the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Mrs. Sandhu, a free-lance artist, plan to wed within two weeks.

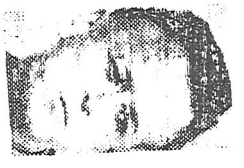
Announcement of their engagement was first published in a copyrighted story in Tuesday's Knoxville Journal.

"I think it's a marvelous thing," Lane continued. "I like Anna a lot. It will be very good for James to have someone around who loves and cares for him."

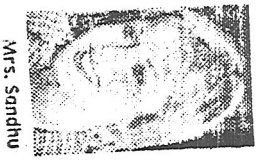
Mrs. Sandhu was one of two persons to accompany Ray and Lane to Washington in August for hearings before the House Committee on Assassinations.

Lane said he plans to return to Memphis within a few days, where he has moved his legal office as part of his attempt to secure a trial by jury for Ray.

"I told him I'd be very pleased to be present at his wedding," Lane said. "He's allowed to have five witnesses. I [illegible] is I know he's not capable of murder. [illegible]



Ray



Mrs. Sandhu

The wedding will be held under security guard at the maximum security prison's visitor's room. Mrs. Sandhu will be allowed to visit with Ray following the ceremony until the end of normal visiting hours.

"I guess I'll have to commute a lot between Knoxville and Petros," she said in an interview with The Journal. "James is allowed two visits a week, of four hours each. And that's about it."

She further explained that Ray didn't really propose, but their plans for marriage came "as a mutual understanding of our feelings.

"I admired him because I thought he had the courage to stand up for what he believed," she added. "And our relationship just grew from there."

It will be the second marriage for Mrs. Sandhu, and the first for Ray.

Mrs. Sandhu at first declined to discuss her wedding plans with Ray, saying that she feared "retaliation" from persons who didn't understand her reasons for marrying Ray.

"I just know that I've found no racial hatred in him at all," she said. "And I want people to know what a nice man he is."